

## CHAPTER 10 HUMAN USE

### Characterization

#### *Human Use of the Watershed*

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) management objectives for federal public lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed provide for producing a sustainable supply of timber and other forest commodities while emphasizing ecosystem management. On USFS lands, providing water to the Corbett Water District has been designated as the principal and most important use of the watershed. Recreational use of the federal lands in the watershed is limited, given the lack of recreational facilities and presence of several private gates that restrict motorized access on most of the roads leading into the watershed. There are private lands dispersed throughout the watershed that are primarily forested and are managed as timber lots. A few residences are concentrated in the southwestern portion of the watershed near Osburn Field Airstrip.

Historical human use in the watershed focused on logging. The Bridal Veil Lumber Company logged in the watershed from the late 1880s, initially with oxen and then using narrow gage railroads. Sites and features within the watershed attest to this historical use.

Two popular recreational resources are located directly adjacent to the Gordon Creek Watershed. METRO's Oxbow Regional Park is located to the west, across the Sandy River. Larch Mountain, a popular destination in the Mount Hood National Forest, is located to the east. Camp Collins, a YMCA summer camp, is also located across the Sandy River adjacent to Oxbow Park. Although the recreational areas are in close proximity to the watershed, there is no documentation that Oxbow Park and Larch Mountain visitors enter or recreate within the watershed. Sherrard Point is also a popular recreation destination.

A large electrical powerline corridor crosses a portion of the southeastern reaches of the Gordon Creek Watershed, crossing the upper reaches of Thompson Creek.

### Current Conditions

#### *Towns and Populated Places*

According to the US Geological Survey (USGS) Geographic Name Information System, there are no populated places or incorporated cities within the Gordon Creek Watershed. However, aerial photographs document that there are residences located along SE Trout Creek Road, near Osburn Field Airstrip. These residences are accessible via SE Gordon Creek Road.

There are several towns in the vicinity of the watershed. The City of Gresham, the closest city to the watershed, is approximately six miles west of the Gordon Creek Watershed. Other populated places near the watershed include Latourell, Corbett, Springdale, and Orient in Multnomah County, and Cottrell and Aims in Clackamas County.

### ***Water Resources***

The Gordon Creek Watershed contains several smaller creeks in addition to Gordon Creek. All of the smaller creeks within the watershed drain into Gordon Creek, which drains into the Sandy River. The Corbett Water District, serving approximately 3,000 people in Multnomah County, has water rights to 4.0 cubic feet per seconds (cfs) on Gordon Creek (for more information, see Chapter 4: Hydrology and Water Use). The extent to which residential uses in the watershed rely on groundwater, stream, or springs has not been documented for this study. However it can be presumed that residential development in the area relies on potable water from one of these resource types.

Water resources adjacent to the Gordon Creek Watershed include the Bull Run Watershed Management Unit located to the southeast of the watershed, the Sandy River located to the west, and Buck Creek located to the north. The Bull Run Watershed Management Unit provides drinking water to Portland and neighboring communities.

### ***Forest Resources***

The Gordon Creek Watershed is mostly forest land. The BLM, USFS, and private citizens own land within the watershed. The BLM manages the forest land largely for timber production. The USFS, under a cooperative agreement with the Corbett Water District, manages its land primarily as a municipal water supply. Private timberland tracts range from small woodlots to large managed holdings.

### ***Recreation Resources***

There are no developed recreational facilities on BLM lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed other than a small portion of the Larch Mountain Environmental Education Site located in Township 1 South, Range 5 East, Section 3, Willamette Meridian. The site is characterized by a natural setting of older forest of Douglas-fir and western hemlock with some younger forest present. The site's facilities include a small parking area, a single vault restroom, designated trails, and two open-air 24-foot shelters with picnic tables. There is a half-mile use-established trail that runs south of Larch Mountain Education Site from Road 1-5E-3, beginning about 300 feet east of the parking area and heading south towards a large Douglas-fir tree. The trail then heads north again and ends on the same road near the Corbett water facilities. The trail is not designated or maintained and receives relatively low use consisting primarily of hiking. This site is used by local students for habitat, stream, soils and forest ecology activities which include conducting research on forest, stream, and wetland ecosystems.

Management of the Larch Mountain Environmental Education Site will be addressed in the upcoming Sandy River Watershed Analysis Revision.

Data on the extent of recreational use of BLM lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed are not available. Visitation is likely relatively low, given that public motorized vehicle access to BLM lands is restricted by private gates along major access roads leading into the watershed. However, non-motorized recreational activities may include hunting, fishing, hiking, skiing, horseback riding, mountain biking, target shooting, and gathering of special forest products.

USFS land in the watershed has been closed to motorized vehicles under Closure Order MH-227-04-93 (November 9, 1993). Forest Road 20, also referred to as Larch Mountain Road, may provide human access to the upper reaches of the watershed. It descends Larch Mountain and Sherrard Point outside of the watershed, and enters the northern-most area of the watershed from the north, traveling through the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) and Mt. Hood National Forest within the watershed. Forest roads 20 and 1509 were gated and currently no motorized vehicle access is allowed. Although it is not a designated trail for hikers, there is evidence of foot traffic along the road, most likely by hikers, hunters, and mushroom gatherers (Hinatsu 2006, pers. comm.; Walker 2006, pers. comm.). Several other national forest roads are connected to Forest Road 20, but the gates on Forest Road 20 restrict access to those roads as well.

The Sandy River, into which Gordon Creek flows, is a major recreational destination, primarily for day trips for residents of the Portland metropolitan area and other nearby communities. Major developed recreational sites along the river include Lewis and Clark State Park located near the confluence of the Sandy and Columbia rivers, Dabney State Park located approximately 2.5 miles upstream, Camp Collins YMCA camp, Oxbow Park located across from the confluence of Gordon Creek and the Sandy River, and the Portland Water Bureau's Dodge Park located approximately halfway between Oxbow Park and the City of Sandy. These parks, as well as the Sandy River in general, are used extensively for a wide variety of recreational activities.

Recreational use at Oxbow Park is concentrated to the west of Gordon Creek Road and does not extend into the watershed (Doran 2006, pers. comm.). The Gordon Creek Bridge at the confluence of Gordon Creek and the Sandy River, and the closure of parking beneath the bridge from May 1 to October 1, are likely to deter recreational use in the watershed. In addition, thorny plants, such as Devil's club, prevent human access along Gordon Creek from Oxbow Park. Although natural and built environments discourage human access into the Gordon Creek Watershed, anglers may occasionally enter the watershed from the Sandy River.

The lower portion of the Sandy River from Dodge Park near its confluence with the Bull Run River to Dabney State Park near Stark Street Bridge was added to the National Wild and Scenic River System under the 1988 Oregon

Omnibus National Wild and Scenic River Act. The upper 3.8 miles of the designated segment are managed under a *scenic* classification and the lower 8.7 miles are managed under a *recreational* classification, including the portion where Gordon Creek flows into the Sandy River. The outstanding values identified for the designated river segment are Scenic, Fisheries, Recreation, Geology, Wildlife, Water Quality, Botanical and Ecological. The same segment has also been designated a State Scenic Waterway, with the upper 3.8 miles of the designated segment managed as a *Natural River Area* and the lower 8.7 miles managed as a *Scenic River Area*.

In 1993 a joint management plan by the BLM and the Oregon State Park and Recreation Department was completed for the Sandy Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway, and the plan continues to provide management guidance for the designated segment today

### ***Visual Resources***

In an effort to address viewshed resources on BLM lands, a Visual Resource Management (VRM) classification system was used to inventory all BLM lands in the Salem District. Within the VRM system, there are four classes of visual values and protection. Class I lands have the most outstanding scenic values and protection, while Class IV lands are generally less scenic areas with fewer restrictions. Most of the BLM lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed fall within the Class IV category. There are no Class I lands present in the watershed. The only Class II lands are located within the Larch Mountain Environmental Education Site. The only Class III lands are located along a county road in the northern half of the 40-acre parcel of BLM land in the northwest corner of Township 1 South, Range 5 East, Section 9, Willamette Meridian. USFS lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed (excluding the Bull Run Watershed Management Unit) have been designated as a scenic viewshed.

### ***Native American and Historical Resource Use***

One prehistoric site (Smithsonian trinomial 35MU72) containing a human bone fragment and other animal bone fragments with no associated artifacts, has been documented within the Gordon Creek Watershed. However, the archaeologist for USFS Zigzag Ranger District believes that further research is needed to validate the human bone fragment (T. Parker 2006, pers. comm.).

### **Reference Conditions**

Many historical archaeological resources (isolated finds) and archaeological sites have been discovered on federal land in the Sandy River basin. The highest densities appear to be located on Mount Hood National Forest property on the slopes of Larch Mountain. Some sites have also been found on BLM lands further downstream in the basin. A substantial record of historical logging activities has been identified by BLM and USFS archaeologists. Sites and features are primarily associated with the Bridal Veil

Lumber Company, which operated in the watershed from the 1880s through the 1930s. Archaeological resources discovered include (but are not limited to) railroad-logging grade remnants, many of which have been converted to roads, railroad-logging trestles, oxen skid roads, donkey engine platforms, springboard notches in tree stumps, isolated dwelling and cabin remnants, emergency shelters, logging camp sites, dump sites, steam donkey, a look-out, and historical trails.

## **Modern Management Activities**

Federal and private landowners may use prescribed fire and salvage logging as management tools within the Gordon Creek Watershed. Prescribed fire may be used as a fuels reduction treatment measure or as a means to rehabilitate or maintain forest productivity. Fuel treatments may be used, for example, to reduce risk to special status species or reduce risks to safety and neighboring economic resources on private lands (especially in wildland/urban interface areas). The use of prescribed fire for ecosystem management is intended to restore or maintain ecosystem processes or structures that have been limited by relatively effective fire exclusion. Salvage logging may be used to remove trees that are dead or dying as a result of fire or infestation, and may serve to facilitate forest rehabilitation and restoration, reduce future forest fire risk, and/or to generate timber harvest revenues.

Future fire management activities in the Gordon Creek Watershed will include hazard fuel treatment, roadside pruning, fire fuel breaks, and pile and burn treatment (B. Raible, BLM, 2006, pers. comm.). If thinning occurs along open roads or near residences, the BLM typically treats the thinning slash mechanically by piling and burning. These open roads have a higher potential for human-caused fire starts, so creating a fuel-free area decreases the probability of starts and a safer area for firefighters to control a fire. In addition to the slash treatment, heavier thinning in these areas or in strategic locations (such as the watershed break with the Bull Run River) can reduce the potential for crown fires.

Protocols for prescribed fire on BLM lands in the Gordon Creek Watershed are established in the Northwest Oregon Fire Management Plan. The plan is a detailed program of action to carry out fire management policies and achieve resource management and fire protection objectives as defined in the Salem BLM District Resource Management Plan (1995). These protocols are intended, in part, to minimize risks to property and resources, and to minimize air and water quality effects of prescribed fires. The plan documents the fire program that will aid achievement of management objectives in the Salem BLM District Resource Management Plan (1995). The Salem BLM District Resource Management Plan is supported by and consistent with the Northwest Oregon Forest Management Plan.

## **Discussion**

### ***Trends in Human Use***

Evidence of human use of the Gordon Creek Watershed is limited primarily to timber production, beginning in the 1890s. The Bridal Veil Lumber Company logged the watershed until the late 1930s, and other private landowners continue logging and habitat management activities in the area today. Recreational use of BLM lands in the watershed is not expected to grow significantly given the current restrictions to motorized public access. However, dispersed non-motorized activities would still be expected to occur. BLM has not attempted to prevent recreational use in the watershed—most of the gates were privately installed to reduce undesirable or illegal uses such as vandalism, dumping, and long term occupancy. Human uses other than forestry and recreation include the Osburn Field Airstrip and the few residences surrounding the airstrip.